

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, May 18th 2016

“For whoever is not against us is for us.” Mark 9

Whether it's in religion or politics, I instinctively recoil against litmus tests that define who's okay and who's not. As Pope Francis says, who am I to judge? Thus I read today's passage from Mark with great joy.

“For whoever is not against us is for us.”

OMG! Jesus is telling us to assume that we're on the same “side” as good people of all types even if they aren't exactly like us. We have to be as open to others as Jesus was despite the fact that His actions often upset the Pharisees and other strict observers of the law. Unfortunately such stress on “jots and tittles” didn't end during the first century.

My early memories are of a Church heavily focused on observing the letter of the law. Catholics debated about whether it was sinful to attend a Protestant wedding or funeral and Protestants were equally antagonistic to us. We had to protect ourselves from dangerous ideas lest we lose our faith. Too often we lived behind walls of our own making. I hardly knew any Protestants, let alone non-Christians, until I went to college.

While Vatican II broke down many barriers, I am thrilled by the current revival of the Council's spirit of reaching out in love to all who will respond. Every time I see Pope Francis collaborating with people of other faiths to help the poor, I want to cheer. Now all of us need to find ways to bring this spirit and the Year of Mercy to life in our own communities. We will be richer for it.

I love volunteering on refugee problems for our local Lutheran Family Services agency where I work with a Muslim colleague who wears a hijab and a friend who heads the local Anti-Defamation League. It's a perfect illustration of what Jesus admonishes us to do in today's Gospel and what the Pope is doing on the world stage.

It's amazing what can happen when the only litmus test we apply is love of God and neighbor!

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